

1888]

DANGEROUS BOATS

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this year, a couple of boat-loads of men being lost. 000
Two years afterwards Robertson lost the whole of his kit, specially got together for his exploration of Kafiristan, a couple of horses and about twenty men going down at the same time, owing to the officer in charge having allowed the boat to be overloaded. Luckily for Robertson he was not there, having gone up-stream to look at a bridge site for me, but it was an expensive way of having the lesson rubbed in that you should never in wild countries permit other people, however well-meaning, to take charge of your baggage.

The road led up from the Indus through a bare plain to the Sai valley and passed through thousands of acres of once cultivated land, now almost entirely abandoned. We halted to breakfast and to pass the heat of the day at Damot, a village at the mouth of the Damot nullah, famous for its markhor ground, in an orchard which was a great natural harbour bound together by countless vines. Amongst these, making at a distance a lovely picture, little naked boys played and swung on loops of vine; close at hand they were too dirty to be even picturesque.

We passed on the road a group of Balti coolies, who threw themselves at my horse's feet in a body, and prayed for help. There was nothing I could do for them at the moment, though the mere fact that I enquired into their grievances had, as I afterwards heard, a good effect, and got them dismissed to their homes, but Robertson stopped behind to see what a little doctoring could do. It was not much; the men, fifty-three in number, were the remains of a body of a hundred coolies who had left Baltistan six

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months before, impressed by the Kashmir authorities as transport for the army assembling at Gilgit; they were, to a man almost, suffering from diarrhoea and dysentery brought on by over-work and bad food, and several were dying, the worst cases being placed by the runnel of an irrigation channel, close enough to reach the water with their hands. This was all the help their companions could give them. Forty men of the original band were said to have died, the remainder were being slowly worked to death, and were then being taken to Benji to bring up grain to Gilgit for the troops. One poor wretch had a hole in his back where his load had worn away the flesh. The whole thing was sickening; war is bad enough at any time, but mismanaged war is hell.

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In the evening we moved further up the Rai stream to Chakarkot, another pretty little camp in the village orchards.

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The next three marches to Gilgit were at that time horrible, through a howling wilderness; for nearly twenty miles there was not a drop of water, except when the road dipped right down to the bank of the Gilgit river, and that was running thick and slab like gritty ooze. Up and down over spurs of hills, into gaping ravines, now at the level of the river, now a thousand feet up, along cliffs glaring and blazing in the sun, the miserable path ran on. Going free and comfortable as we were, it was easy to realise what such a road meant to laden coolies or troops. Once we had some rain at night, and were treated on a small scale to one of the most curious phenomena to be met with in this weird country, namely, the mud flow, which forms the alluvial fan.

Kashmir Medical Mission

Ki mounted; and the horse, which could have carried one,
519 became so exhausted under the weight of three, that, on
reaching his stable, he died."

The application of the story is obvious enough, and is
a good illustration of the natural wit of the Kashmiris.

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There was another matter which troubled them much,
and that was the forced labour on the Gilgit road.
Gilgit, an outpost to the north of Kashmir, 100 miles
from Srinagar, was garrisoned by Kashmir troops. It is
situated in a foodless region, so the troops had to be fed
from the Kashmir Valley. No road had been made there,
so all the supplies had to be carried by coolies. These
men were collected from the villages with the aid of
peon-gangs. The peons always brought in more than
were required so that those who had money could buy
themselves off their hands.

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At Bandipore they were collected and loaded up. The
only rations allowed them was a seer of rice per day; this
they had to carry, plus the straw for making their straw
shoes, plus their load of food for the garrison. No
provision was made for them as they crossed the snow
passes, so that many died on the road, and often it
happened that when they did reach Gilgit they were sold
as slaves to the wild inhabitants of that inhospitable
region. The grandfather of one of my servants, who
was sent there, was exchanged for a Chinese dog, but
later on he escaped.

600 Dr Arthur Neve, in his book, *Thirty Years in Kashmir*,
writes:

"To the Englishman the word Gilgit should recall
the many gallant deeds of the nineties—the capture of
Hunza, the relief of Chitral, and the Pamir Commission.
During the last half-century Kashmir is the only Indian
native state that has increased in area. And the increase